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NEWS RELEASE
NORTH CAROLINA BICENTENNIAL

NOTED HISTORIAN TO WRITE
CHRONOLOG OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

William S. Powell

RALEIGH--

WILLIAM S. POWELL, NOTED HISTORIAN OF NORTH CAROLINA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL, HAS RECENTLY AGREED TO WRITE A SERIES OF ESSAYS FOR POPULAR DISTRIBUTION BY THE NORTH CAROLINA BICENTENNIAL OFFICE. TO BE KNOWN AS A "CHRONOLOG OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN NORTH CAROLINA," THE SERIES WILL CONSIST OF BRIEF ESSAYS ON HISTORIC EVENTS DURING THE PERIOD OF THE REVOLUTION WHICH WILL BE CELEBRATED OR COMMEMORATED IN NORTH CAROLINA. EACH ESSAY WILL BE A NUMBERED PART OF THE SERIES AND WILL BE RELEASED FOR PUBLICATION IN NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, AND OTHER PERIODICALS ON THE OCCASION OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EVENT. EACH ESSAY WILL BE EMBELLISHED WITH INFORMATION ON FESTIVALS AND OTHER COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS SCHEDULED THROUGHOUT NORTH CAROLINA TO CELEBRATE THE HISTORIC OCCURRENCE.

THE "CHRONOLOG" WILL FIRST APPEAR IN CONNECTION WITH THE CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST PROVINCIAL CONGRESS WHICH MET AT NEW BERN ON AUGUST 25, 1774, AND WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE BICENTENNIAL PERIOD. ALTHOUGH THE ESSAYS ARE DESIGNED PRIMARILY FOR DISTRIBUTION TO NEWSPAPERS,

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NORTH CAROLINA CHRONOLOG

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EACH WILL BE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST APPROXIMATELY ONE WEEK BEFORE THE EVENT CELEBRATED. IN CONNECTION WITH THE FIRST ESSAY IN AUGUST, A MASTER CALENDAR OF EVENTS TO BE COVERED IN THE CHRONOLOG SERIES WILL BE ANNOUNCED.

IN ADDITION TO WRITING THE CHRONOLOG, POWELL, THE AUTHOR OF THE NORTH CAROLINA GAZETEER AND A HOST OF OTHER BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS ON NORTH CAROLINA, IS CURRENTLY COMPILING AN EIGHT VOLUME DICTIONARY OF NORTH CAROLINA BIOGRAPHY, A MASSIVE STUDY OF THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF NOTABLE NORTH CAROLINIANS. STYLED ON THE PATTERN OF THE HIGHLY RESPECTED DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES ARE BEING PREPARED BY NEARLY FIVE HUNDRED HISTORIANS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE. THE FIRST VOLUME OF POWELL'S DICTIONARY, WHICH HAS BEEN FUNDED IN PART AS A BICENTENNIAL PROJECT, WILL APPEAR BEFORE JULY 1976.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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*** NEW BERN IS HOLDING A 10 DAY CELEBRATION AUGUST 16-25 TO CELEBRATE THE FIRST PROVINCIAL CONGRESS. IT INCLUDES CRAFT DEMONSTRATIONS, POWER BOAT RACES, A REGATTA, PARADES, DRAMATIC PRESENTATIONS, THE N. C. SYMPHONY, BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS, AND A MAJOR DEDICATORY EVENT ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 25.

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THE FIRST PROVINCIAL CONGRESS

by

William S. Powell

In the swelling Revolutionary movement two hundred years ago this month the people of North Carolina acted both boldly and cautiously. The great mass meeting in Wilmington on July 21 had called upon the people to send delegates to what was termed "a General Meeting of this Province" to be held at the Johnston County Courthouse on August 20.

Between late July and mid-August provincial leaders grew bolder and they changed the site of the meeting from interior Johnston County to New Bern right under the nose of the governor and other royal officials. The General Meeting actually convened on August 25 and it has come to be recognized as the state's First Provincial Congress. This one, together with four other Congresses, provided the essential leadership during the period between the collapse of the last effective royal general assembly and the first state legislature.

It was in these years that men were gaining valuable experience in self-government. Heretofore, they had relied upon the royal governor to call the assembly into session. They now discovered that there was no magic in the governor's summons, and that they themselves could convene the representatives of the people in a legislative body.

This first congress in North Carolina had come about because the British Parliament had passed five acts to punish Boston after the Tea Party there. Boston called on all the colonies to come to her defense and in one after another, as word was passed down the Atlantic seaboard, meetings were held.

In North Carolina this revolutionary body convened on August 25, 1774. It was composed of seventy-one delegates chosen by mass meetings in most of the counties and the larger towns. Present were many men who had already publicly protested the Stamp Act and who had openly questioned the authority of Parliament in the acts against Boston. This clearly was an extra-legal gathering, spontaneously formed, and bent on having its views known.

The delegates, nevertheless, were still British subjects and this they clearly realized. Their first act was to draw up a lengthy and politely phrased resolution to King George in which they expressed the most sacred respect for the British Constitution and their "inviolable and unshaken Fidelity to our sovereign." They vowed to maintain the succession of the House of Hanover "as by Law Established."

But being good "law and order" men, many of whom were trained and skilled lawyers, they called upon good King George to protect them from the unjustified acts of Parliament. Insisting that they claimed "no more than the rights of Englishmen," they sought his intervention in securing those rights which Parliament had abridged.

Having done this, these North Carolinians then issued a threat. Effective the first of January 1775, they would cease to import East India goods, except medicine. Beginning in October 1775, they would not export tobacco or naval stores. Beginning the very next month, in September 1774, they would cease to use tea. And, finally, expressing total sympathy with Boston, they agreed to send delegates to a national congress to be convened in Philadelphia in just a matter of days.

Still protesting that they were loyal British, the body resolved "That Liberty is the Spirit of the British Constitution, and that it is the duty, and will be the Endeavour of us as British Americans to transmit this happy Constitution to our posterity in a state if possible better than we found it, and to suffer it to undergo a change which may impair that invaluable Blessing would be to disgrace those ancestors who at the expense of their blood purchased those privileges which their degenerate posterity are too weak or too wicked to maintain inviolate."

Having remained in session only three days, this body fully launched North Carolina into the Revolutionary movement in its determination to maintain long-understood British liberties. Its resolutions gave clear expression to the American views on the questions in dispute, and the honor of the Province was pledged to support whatever measures the general Congress might recommend to the colonies.

Moderator John Harvey was authorized to call another meeting whenever he thought it necessary. Heretofore, of course, it had been the prerogative of the royal governor alone to convene the delegates of the people, and Governor Josiah Martin was still in North Carolina and would remain until the following May.



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NEWS RELEASE
NORTH CAROLINA BICENTENNIAL

THE EDENTON TEA PARTY
BY
WILLIAM S. POWELL

PART II OF THE CONTINUING CHRONOLOG OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

When the First Provincial Convention, or Congress as it was soon to be called, met in New Bern in August, 1774, it adopted resolutions of various kinds to support the American side in the dispute with Great Britain. These resolutions were soon taken notice of by the ladies of Edenton and their reaction to them was expressed in the so-called Edenton Tea Party. The representatives who met in New Bern had said that after the first day of September, 1774, the people of the colony would use no more East India Tea. After the first of January they would not import any more British goods or manufactures, except medicines, and unless the American grievances were redressed before October, 1775, no tobacco or naval stores would be shipped out of the colony to Great Britain.

All persons not complying with these resolves would be considered enemies to the country. North Carolina was fully determined to support the non-importation and non-exportation agreement reached in the Continental Congress.

On October 25, 1774, fifty-one ladies gathered in Edenton and formed an Association of their own to show their support of the American cause. Just exactly

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THE EDENTON TEA PARTY

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who issued the call for this meeting or precisely where the meeting was held is not stated in the meagre records of the gathering. Tradition says that they met at the home of Mrs. Elizabeth King, and that Mrs. Penelope Barker presided.

The document that they signed, however, was a clear statement of their intentions to support the revolutionary resolutions of the Provincial Congress. "As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country," they agreed, "and as it has been thought necessary for the publick good to enter into several particular Resolves by a meeting of Members of Deputies from the whole Province, it is a duty that we owe not only to our near and dear relations and connexions, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so."

The document was then signed by the fifty-one ladies. There is no mention of tea, but the following spring a Scottish visitor, of strong Tory sympathy, was in the Lower Cape Fear section of the colony when she commented that "the ladies have burnt their tea in a solemn procession, but they....delayed however till the sacrifice was not very considerable, as I do not think any one offered above a quarter of a pound." We cannot be certain that she was referring to the Edenton ladies, so this may have been something that occurred in Wilmington, the town she was visiting and generally writing about in her journal.

But on January 16 the Morning Chronicle and London Advertizer carried a report on the Edenton Association as well as the text of the document and the names of the ladies who signed it. On the last day of that month Arthur Iredell, who was in London, wrote to his brother, James, in Edenton, that he had read about the Edenton ladies who had "signalized themselves by their protest against tea drinking." And he asked if the little coastal town had a "female congress," too. "I hope not," he continued in high sarcasm, "for we Englishmen are afraid of the male congress, but if the ladies, who have ever since the Amazonian era been esteemed the most formidable enemies; if they, I say, should attack us, the most fatal consequence is to be dreaded. So dextrous in the handling of a dart, each wound they give is mortal; whilst we, so unhappily formed by nature, the more we strive to conquer them, the more we are conquered.

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THE EDENTON TEA PARTY

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"The Edenton ladies, conscious, I suppose, of this superiority on their side, by a former experience, are willing, I imagine, to crush us into atoms by their omnipotency: the only security on our side to prevent the impending ruin, that I can perceive, is the probability that there are but few places in America which possess so much female artillery as Edenton."

A colored mezzotint entitled "A Society of Patriotic Ladies at Edenton in North Carolina" was published in London in late March 1775. The print is a caricature of several leading British politicians dressed in the guise of women.

Local historians used to cite the "Edenton Tea Party" as the earliest known instance of political activity by American women, but George Stevenson, Jr., of the North Carolina State Archives, has recently noted several associations of women that were formed against tea drinking in 1770 in various colonies and that in January, 1774, "57 ladies of Bedford, in Dartmouth," according to a report from Newport, Rhode Island, had formed an association against drinking East India Tea. Nevertheless, it was the Edenton Association which attracted wide attention in London and which has come to symbolize the revolutionary spirit as it was demonstrated by women.

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State of North Carolina

(For Release May 31, 1975)
(Third in a Series)

GOVERNOR MARTIN FLEES NEW BERN

By William S. Powell

The thirty-first of May two hundred years ago found North Carolinians very active indeed. From the coast to very nearly the western limits of settlement people on both sides of the explosive questions of the day were busy.

Governor Josiah Martin in New Bern for some time had been deeply concerned not only about his role as royal governor in North Carolina but also about the personal safety of his family. On May 6 a post-rider arrived in the provincial capital there with news of the Battle of Lexington on April 19. The militia began at once to drill, and the publisher of the local newspaper concluded: "It is now full Time for us to be on our Guard, and to prepare ourselves against every Contingency. The Sword is now drawn, and God knows when it will be sheathed."

On May 23 Governor Martin dismounted certain guns in the town but the Safety Committee told him that it was their desire that they be remounted. They had already threatened to seize the guns anyway, and a day or two later they did so. The royal governor had neither gun nor man to protect himself; he was a prisoner in the Palace under strict surveillance.

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On the 31st Martin and his family fled by way of Cross Creek (now Fayetteville) to the Lower Cape Fear, a region filled with loyal Highland Scots who were expected to aid the Royal cause. In New Bern Martin left nine of his horses, a handsome coach, much of his household furniture, and many of his books. At Cape Fear the Martin children and their mother, who was pregnant, and the governor's sister, were put aboard a small ship and the captain instructed to take them to the first "safe port." This turned out to be New York.

Martin had eluded the Patriots of New Bern and he did the same thing when those of Wilmington set out to take him. Josiah Martin too, refuge on board the British sloop Cruizer which had been in the waters of the Cape Fear River since the days of the Stamp Act Resistance. From the security of the ship Martin set about to lay plans that he hoped would enable him to resume his post as His Majesty's Governor of North Carolina.

On the same day that Governor Martin fled, the Safety Committee for the town of New Bern and the County of Craven convened and adopted resolutions recommending that local merchants stop all exportations to Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, as

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well as to the army and navy at Boston. They condemned the British murder "in cool Blood, without Provocation" of the inhabitants near Boston. From all the evidence that had come to hand, it appeared to these citizens of New Bern and Craven County "that the British Ministry mean no longer to receive the peaceable Addresses of the much injured People of America, on the Subject of their invaded Rights; but are determined, since they will not voluntarily make a total Surrender of their Freedom and Constitution, to wrest it from them by the brutal Hand of Violence." In view of this, it appeared to them that the only alternative was that "they must resolve firmly and manfully to maintain those Rights, which God gave, and the Constitution warrants."

They also expressed the fear that slaves in the provinces "may be instigated and encouraged by our inveterate Enemies to an Insurrection." It was recommended, therefore, that inhabitants of both town and county form themselves immediately into companies, that officers be selected, and that instruction follow in the use of arms. And in order to get action underway, the Committee named fourteen men to summon the companies into being.

In addition, an Association was formed which still resolved (even at this late

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date) to "pay all due Allegiance to his Majesty King GEORGE the Third, and endeavour to continue the Succession of his Crown ... as by Law established, against the present or any future wicked Minister or arbitrary Set of men whatsoever." At the same time they were determined "to assert our Rights as Men." They expressed awareness of losing valuable liberties and privileges by recent acts of Parliament; they expressed shock at the cruel scene recently enacted in Massachusetts. Their future welfare, they agreed, depended upon "a firm Union of the Inhabitants" and careful observation of the resolutions of the Continental Congress, therefore, they resolved, "We do hereby agree and associate, under all the Ties of Religion, Honour, and Regard for Posterity, that we will adopt, and endeavour to execute, the measures which the General Congress ... may conclude on, for preserving our Constitution, and opposing the Execution of the several arbitrary and illegal Acts of the British Parliament."

On the western frontier of North Carolina, in the small town of Charlotte, seat of Mecklenburg County, the Committee of Safety met on that same last day of May 1775. The members reported that they had heard that both Houses of Parliament three months previously had declared the American colonies to be in a state of actual rebellion.

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Parliament came to this decision because the colonies had sent delegates to a Continental Congress.

The Mecklenburg Committee reasoned that if Parliament had declared the colonies to be in rebellion then the laws and commissions confirmed by the King and Parliament in the past must no longer be valid. Faced with the prospect of a body of people on the frontier with neither law nor government, the Committee concluded that some provisions had to be made quickly. In due course, they said, both the Continental Congress and the Provincial Congress would surely step in to fill the need, but in the meantime the Mecklenburg Committee would make provisions for Mecklenburg.

All commissions, both civil and military, heretofore granted by the Crown, were now suspended. All former laws were also considered to have been suspended - and suspended is the very word they used, suggesting that they might perhaps be restored at some future time. In the interim, however, the Committee called upon the inhabitants of Mecklenburg County to meet on a certain day and form eight companies for the county and one for the town of Charlotte. From each of these companies two "discreet Freeholders" would be chosen to serve as "Select men" or Constables. All

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of the Select Men would meet together quarterly to act as a county court, and one of the men would be chosen to serve as Clerk. Provisions also were made for the collection of taxes of various kinds; persons who refused to obey these "Resolves" were made liable to punishment.

The Safety Committee also directed that the militia companies provide themselves with arms and stand ready to receive orders from the Provincial Congress or from the Mecklenburg Safety Committee. Colonel Thomas Polk and Dr. Joseph Kennedy were designated to lay in military supplies.

These Mecklenburg Resolves were signed only by Ephraim Brevard, clerk of the Committee.

Slowly, very slowly to be sure, and deliberately the people of North Carolina were making decisions in local meetings from which there would be no turning back. They were determined to hold on to the freedom and liberty that they had long enjoyed as British subjects. If freedom and liberty were to be denied them as British subjects, they they and British must each to their own way.

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For Release July 19, 1975
Fourth in a Series

North Carolina Troops Capture British Fort - July 19, 1775

By William S. Powell

When Josiah Martin, the last Royal Governor of North Carolina, fled from the Palace at New Bern on the last day of May, 1775, to the protection of Fort Johnston at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, he felt secure because the guns of British ships were nearby. Possession of the fort soon became a goal of the Whigs living in that part of the province.

Fort Johnston, at the site of what is now the town of Southport, was built in stages between 1748 and 1764 and named for Governor Gabriel Johnston, chief executive during the years 1732-1754. Its initial purpose had been to protect North Carolina from the threat of French or Spanish invasion during the inter-colonial wars of the time. In 1747 and 1748 the Spanish attacked and briefly occupied both Brunswick and Beaufort.

When North Carolina troops participated in the combined British-American expedition to Cartagena in South America in 1740 they had an opportunity to examine

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at close range the Spanish fortification there. When they returned and began to build the fort on the lower Cape Fear, they attempted to copy the work they had seen in Colombia. They met with only indifferent success. It was certainly not a fort to the liking of Governor William Tryon in 1766 when he commented that "the proportions observed in the Construction of the Fort are as Miserable as are the Materials with which it is built: Lime, Half Broken Oister Shells, and sand, are the Ingredients, called Tabby Work. There is so great a proportion of sand that every Gun fired, as a Signal or on Public Occasions, brings down some of the Parapet. In short, I think the Fort a Disgrace to the Ordinance His Majesty has placed in it."

Yet Fort Johnston was all the province had, and arms and ammunition for the protection of the colony were received and stored there. It was from this fort that Tryon secured military supplies to equip the militia that he called out to put down the Regulator uprising at the Battle of Alamance in 1771. Customs collectors and other port officials operated out of the fort, and various local militia officers as well as Britishers took turns commanding the post. It clearly was an unpopular assignment as no one remained for very long. The complement of the fort was usually quite small -- around two dozen men -- but sometimes larger numbers might be there briefly. Those assigned to the fort generally took up residence in the surrounding countryside and sometimes not a soul was to be found by a messenger trying to get word to the commander.

When Governor Martin reached the fort on June 2, however, it immediately took on great significance to the patriots. Anchored nearby was the Cruizer, an eight-gun sloop of the Royal Navy that had been stationed in North Carolina waters for a number of years. Its commander, Captain Jacob Lobb, had many friends

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ashore, and some of his sailors had actually married North Carolina wives. Lobb, nevertheless, was loyal to His Majesty and to the royal governor. Fort Johnston had been low on powder for some time, and it was reportedly about to be supplemented by the Cruizer. Captain John Collet, commander of the fort, was showing signs of unusual activity. Rumors of a threatened attack on the fort by local militia made Lobb hesitant to send much powder ashore.

Despite the depressing situation which he faced, Martin called a meeting of his Council at the fort on June 25. The majority of the councillors ignored the call, and Captain Collet explained to the few present his precarious position there. Yet the governor was optimistic and authorized militia commissions to new officers and undertook to recruit replacements for the fort's garrison. We petitioned General Thomas Gage in Boston, the British commander in America, for aid in repairing the fort.

It was about this time that Martin heard of the battles of Lexington and Concord two months earlier, and he quickly began to draw up plans to occupy North Carolina by force if necessary. He would recruit a force of Loyalists, largely from among the Highland Scots in the Cape Fear Valley; they would join British forces from Boston and from England and together they would take North Carolina.

Rumors of the forced recruiting of men for the royal banner spread throughout the region. Demands became insistent that the struggling revolutionary government of North Carolina do something. Every day of delay gave the exiled royal governor just that much more time to gain support and to repair his fort. In July the Committee of Safety called for an early meeting of the Provincial Congress, but the machinery of government moved too slowly for the uneasy leaders in the Cape Fear.

At Wilmington the local Committee of Safety reported that the fort's commander, Captain John Collet, a friend of the two last royal governors, was

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getting the fort ready to receive reinforcements. To join in a proposed attack on the fort, men in the Wilmington area "seduced" some seamen aboard merchant vessels in the river by offering them five pound bounties. These men were familiar with British artillery and might prove useful on either side of the walls of the fort: outside in the attack and inside in firing the guns if that became necessary.

It was about the same time that a call went out to the militia and the independent companies in the area to turn out to drive away Captain Collet, "that notorious freebooter.": Under command of Robert Howe, nearly five hundred militiamen marched out of Brunswick on July 15. There was nothing secret about this move, and as a matter of fact a letter signed "The People" was sent to Martin telling him that they had heard a report that Collet intended to dismantle Fort Johnston and they were going down to help him take the cannon from the walls.

Collet told the governor that nearly his whole garrison had deserted and that he could not possibly hold the fort with the three or four men that he could trust. The artillery was hastily taken down and moved to the edge of the water where it could be protected by guns from the ships. All moveable provisions were taken aboard the Cruizer, which was also Martin's new headquarters.

Howe and his men arrived between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, July 19, and began the destruction of the fort by firing on the home of the commander. At sunrise from the deck of the ship Martin witnessed what he called a "savage and audacious mob" led by Howe, John Ashe, and Cornelius Harnett as they burned the fort and the nearby buildings. The next day, marching under three British flags, the men burned the remaining fortifications "with a degree of wanton malice."

North Carolina troops, loosely organized and poorly equipped, had captured a British fort, admittedly a weak fort, but within range of the guns aboard warships. The royal governor described his own position following this action.

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He was, he confided to a superior, "reduced to the deplorable state of being a tame Spectator of Rebellion spreading over thiscountry." He blamed the Committees of Safety, especially the one in Wilmington, for leading the people of his colony along the path of rebellion through what he termed " the basest and most scandalous Sedition and inflamatory falsehoods."

But that was just his point of view. An entirely different account of the events appeared in the August 10 issue of the Virginia Gazette. "I have snatched this opportunity, as I could not do less, in order to give you some account of the convulsions of North Carolina," an unidentified participant wrote. "Immediately upon my arrival in this province, there was an expedition on foot among the people in order to invest themselves of Fort Johnston, where his majesty's ship of war the Cruizer now lies, with governor Martin on board. Upon finding the people so hearty in this cause, I was roused by the beat of drums, as a friend to my country, to embark with them upon this glorious design, and accordingly joined the troops, and marched down, under the command of Colonel John Ashe; but when the governor heard of our intentions, he immediately dismantled the Fort, by heaving the guns from off the Ambezeer, where they now lie, under cover of the man of war. We then were determined to destroy the Fort and all its buildings, to prevent its being a subterfuge for future villains, and accordingly put this scheme in execution, by burning every house."

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For Release August 21, 1975)
Fifth in a Series

"'In defence of our persons, properties and ...rights':
North Carolina's Third Provincial Congress"

By William S. Powell

During the period between the breakdown of the royal government in 1774 and the establishment of the state government in 1776, North Carolina affairs were directed by a series of five Provincial Congresses. These bodies were entirely extra-legal, having no basis in law. They were, nevertheless, powerful in the influence they exerted and there was no effective opposition to the authority they assumed.

The third of these Provincial Congresses in North Carolina gathered in Hillsborough on August 21, 1775, at the call of Samuel Johnston. The two previous meetings had resulted in large measure from the activity of John Harvey, a hot-headed super-patriot who was willing to take matters into his own hands. Harvey, however, had died in May and by previous agreement it fell to the lot of Johnston to make the decision as to when another Congress should be called. An immediate result of the call was the "Fiery Proclamation" issued by royal governor Josiah Martin from aboard a British ship in the Cape Fear River.

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(For Release August 21, 1975)
Fifth in a Series

Martin denounced the Committees of Safety for circulating what he called falsehoods, for misleading the people and turning them against His Majesty. Leaders of the recent activity in the province he termed "evil, pernicious and traitorous." His hand was stayed against them, however, because of his proclaimed "pity for the innocent, misguided and deluded people whom I consider as the blind instruments of their atrocious leaders." Governor Martin expressed his deep fear that "the assembling Convention at Hillsborough will bring the Affairs of this Country to a Crisis which will make it necessary for every man to assert his Principles."

There were 207 delegates elected to the Congress and 184 attended, representing every county and every borough town. Under the gavel of its president, Samuel Johnston, the Congress set about to perform many of the functions of a regularly constituted General Assembly. At the same time, it engaged in many hasty acts and issued directives that no previous legislative body in North Carolina would have considered within its province. This was indeed a more revolutionary body than either of the two preceding Provincial Congresses. Perhaps their success had made the delegates more bold.

Immediately after choosing its officers and arranging for an Anglican minister to read prayers in the local Church, the Congress looked into accusations that one John Coulson of Anson County had been guilty of "dangerous practices against the Liberties of America," and was conveniently confined in the local jail where he had been delivered by several "Gentlemen Volunteers of Anson County." A 41-man committee was appointed to inquire into Coulson's conduct and to report the next day. Perhaps poor deluded Coulson had an honest change of heart or perhaps the large committee simply overwhelmed him, the records do not indicate. The minutes for the next day's meeting however, published a recantation by Coulson of his previous

(For Release August 21, 1975)
Fifth in a Series

position and in very humiliating terms he confessed his guilt, making a promise to try to reclaim "those persons who I have seduced from their duty, and also to induce all other persons over whom I have influence, to aid, support, and defend, the just Rights of America."

Having successfully quieted Coulson the Congress next turned its attention to "several offenders" then confined in the jail at Wilmington. It was directed that these prisoners be removed from Wilmington and delivered to Hillsborough where "their Demerits may be strictly inquired into." Word also was received from Charleston, South Carolina, that two Salisbury men, John Dunn and Benjamin Boote, were somewhat less than enthusiastic about recent activity in North Carolina. They, too, were ordered to be investigated by the Congress. And a committee was appointed to visit the newly arrived Highland Scots in the Cape Fear River Valley to explain what the disagreement with the Mother Country was all about. Word also was to be spread amonth the former Regulators absolving them of any obligation they might have felt to support the British cause on account of an oath they had taken after the Battle of Alamance.

One of the main objectives of the Congress in Hillsborough clearly was to secure the backing of the people of North Carolina for the coming struggle even if that required force and intimidation. A solid front must be presented to London at all costs, and the site of this meeting near the frontier and among people of sometimes questionable loyalty, undoubtedly was chosen with this in mind.

Nevertheless the oath devined by a committee and recommended to be subscribed by each member of the Congress still contained a profession of loyalty and allegiance to King George. The disagreement, they pointed out, was between the colonies and Parliament over the right to tax Americans and nothing else. Since Americans were not represented in Parliament and they were represented in the Continental Congress, it was the Continental Congress that for the moment represented their interests.

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The Congress in Hillsborough also pointed out that the duly designated governor had refused "to exercise the Functions of his office by leaving the Province and retiring on Board a Man of War, without any threats or violence to compell him to such a measure." The Congress, therefore, remained the only source of authority in North Carolina, and in this great emergency it must do whatever had to be done.

Without the least show of hesitation, then, the Provincial Congress set out to prepare the people for the inevitable: the taking up of arms. It drew up a system of government for North Carolina which continued the Provincial Congress with five members from each county and one from each of the six borough towns. This was to be the supreme unit of government. Landowners would be eligible to vote for the delegates. A provincial council was authorized to consist of thirteen members, two from each of the six military districts and one from the province at large. (Cornelius Harnett in October became the president of the council, and it used to be claimed that he was therefore the first "governor" of the state, but this, of course, is not correct.) Beneath the provincial council there were to be district, county, and town safety committees. This proved to be one of the most elaborate forms of government in any of the young states, but it had many good features and some of them were later recommended by the Continental Congress to the other states.

The coming war, which the leaders in Hillsborough said they anticipated, was the most time-consuming subject with which the members became involved. A variety of problems had to be faced and solutions found. Governor Martin's proclamation was received, read in mock disbelief, and ordered to be burned by "the common Hangman." The delegates said that Martin had interfered with local efforts to secure and defend North Carolina from the possibility of treatment such as that recently meted out to Massachusetts by British forces, therefore it became necessary that "this Colony be immediately put into a state of defence."

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The Congress thereupon determined to raise troops in North Carolina and to organize and train them just as if they were to serve in the Continental Army. A quota system for troops was drawn up for each of the counties. To help meet the costs of this new undertaking, the Congress authorized that \$125,000 in bills of credit be issued and a tax of two shillings per year on each taxable person was levied to pay that indebtedness. The counterfeiting of these bills was made a capital offence. And other war measures were also enacted.

On the other hand, the North Carolina Provincial Congress rejected the national plan for a union, the Articles of Confederation. The time had not yet come, they reasoned, for any such action. The Continental Congress should still be relied upon to bring about a reconciliation with the Mother Country. Any such action as envisioned by the proposed Articles of Confederation should be taken only "in Case of the last necessity."

Finally, William Hooper laid before the body a document which he entitled "An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Empire." This was a well-reasoned and apparently sincere plea once again for the restoration of the rights of Englishmen to the colonists. The return to the relationship that existed before 1763 was his earnest desire, and he explained that any apparent departure from the British Constitution by Americans had been "in defence of our persons, properties and those rights which God and the Constitution have made Unalienably ours." In a clear appeal to all British subjects of good will, Hooper continued: "Could these our Sentiments reach the Throne, surely our Sovereign would forbid the horrors of War and desolation to intrude into this once peaceful and happy land, and would stop that deluge of human Blood which now threatens to overflow this Colony, Blood too precious to be shed but in a common cause against the common enemy of Great Britain and her sons."

It would appear, although they perhaps would not have known the term, that the

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Provincial Congress in North Carolina, in common with others elsewhere, was engaged in a game of "brinkmanship." Slow means of communication and a stubborn spirit on both sides which precluded compromise, denied both American and British leaders a clear understanding of the situation, and at the edge of the cliff the ground simply gave way.

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(For Release February 27, 1976)
Sixth in a Series

"North Carolina's First Revolutionary Battle"

by William S. Powell

The Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in southeastern North Carolina on February 27, 1776, was a stunning blow to the opening British campaign in America. It was the first clear victory for American arms and was the cause for considerable rejoicing up and down the Atlantic Seaboard.

North Carolina's last royal governor, Josiah Martin, had fled from his residence in Tryon Palace, New Bern, at the end of May the previous year. He took refuge first at Fort Johnston near the mouth of the Cape Fear River, but Patriot activity in the vicinity was so great that he soon fled to the safety of a British ship anchored in the river. During all the time he was in semi-exile, he was scheming and planning what steps he might take to restore His Majesty's government and good name in the colony. In his shipboard cabin he consorted with friends who called on him, and he wrote to others.

Martin, formerly a lieutenant colonel, devised a plan of military action that he thought would restore British government. He sent this plan to London

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in the care of a trusted friend from the Cape Fear, Alexander Schaw. Schaw went by way of Charleston but before he could sail, his letter was opened and read by the local Committee of Inspection. Its contents, therefore, were known to Patriots. Martin proposed to Lord Dartmouth, colonial secretary, that a combined American-British force should invade North Carolina. From the anticipated base that it would establish, forces might then move against South Carolina and perhaps even into Virginia.

Martin himself promised to recruit a force of Loyalists from within the colony. He had been constantly assured by his friends that large numbers of men would flock to the royal standard when the call was issued for troops to rescue North Carolina from the hands of rebels. At the same time that Martin was notified of the approval of his plan, orders were issued directing Lord Charles Cornwallis and seven regiments of British regulars to sail from Cork, in Ireland, escorted by a powerful fleet under Sir Peter Parker. Sir Henry Clinton, second in command of British forces in America, was directed to sail from Boston with 2,000 men and to take command of the combined operation. All were to rendezvous at Wilmington about the middle of February, 1776.

The plan was excellent, but it failed because the Loyalists in North Carolina were too eager while Clinton and Cornwallis were not eager enough. Martin received dispatches on January 3, 1776, notifying him that his plan had been approved, that Cornwallis and Clinton had received their orders, and that he might proceed with his part of the program. Accordingly, at his command, 1,600 Scottish Highlanders from the Cape Fear Valley of southeastern North Carolina were assembled. They were recruited in part by Lieutenant Colonel Donald MacDonald and Captain Donald McLeod, sent from Boston to form a battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment. Others were enlisted by Alexander

McLean, local resident and trusted friend of Martin. Most of the recruits were Highland Scots, but a few former Regulators also joined them. It was reported that several thousand men were anxious to participate but there were arms for only about one thousand. Some of the troops would remain at Cross Creek, now Fayetteville, to protect it in case it should be attacked by the King's enemies. Recruiters in other parts of the colony met with little success. A group of Loyalists from Guilford County, marching to the Cape Fear, was stopped and turned back in a brief encounter with the local militia under the leadership of Captain William Dent. Dent, however, was killed and became the first casualty of the campaign.

To men who would join him, Martin promised to forgive long overdue land rents as well as to grant them an exemption for twenty years in the future. Those who enlisted would also be given 200 acres of land. These inducements drew a respectable number of men, but not as many as Martin's advisers had anticipated. Recruits came mostly from Scots who had arrived during the past five or six years and had been required to take an oath to support the royal government in the colony as a condition for receiving a grant of land.

A planning meeting was held at Cross Creek on February 5 at which some of the leaders tried to postpone the call to troops to assemble until March 1 unless the British force arrived in the meantime. This cautious advice was rejected, however, and a call was issued for Loyalists to assemble at Cross Creek under Donald MacDonald, newly designated a Brigadier General by Martin. The force was organized about February 15 and was composed of around 700 Highlanders, an equal number of other Loyalists, and 130 former Regulators. All told there were almost 1,600 men ready and eager to restore royal rule.

While the Loyalists had been occupied with their plans, the Patriots, or Whigs as they were also known, were equally as busy. Local leaders in the Cape Fear, including Col. James Moore, Col. Robert Howe and Col. Alexander Lillington, and other provincial leaders, especially Richard Caswell, were fully informed of all that was going on. Governor Martin on one occasion handed a message to a man whom he trusted to be delivered to his Scottish friends; this man showed the message to Whig leaders before delivering it.

Two regiments of the Continental Line were being organized at this time and the local minutemen and militia were being equipped. Men in these units were described as presenting "a most unmartial appearance," but their marksmanship was highly respected. A call went out in early February to alert troops to the possibility of a threat in the Cape Fear region. Breastworks were thrown up at Wilmington to provide protection, guns were put in place and women and children sent away to more secure places. From New Bern, Col. Ricahrd Caswell and troops under his command set out for Cross Creek with orders to go from there to Wilmington and Brunswick. Other militia units were alerted and expected to join in putting down the Loyalist uprising. The senior officer, Col. James Moore, was in command.

Martin's force planned to move toward the coast down the southeast side of the Cape Fear River to meet the British and then join in conquering the colony. MacDonald moved out to February 20 but soon discovered that his route across Rockfish Creek was blocked by Moore; he turned east in the direction of Caswell's militia and then took the Black River Road to Wilmington, expecting little resistance as he moved in that direction. MacDonald outmaneuvered Caswell and Caswell set out to "take possession of the Bridge upon Widow Moore's Creek" about twenty miles above Wilmington which the Loyalists

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would have to cross. Colonel Moore sent Colonel Lillington to join Caswell while Moore himself went in the direction of Wilmington to be in a position to attack MacDonald's forces from the rear.

As soon as Lillington reached the bridge he saw how it might be defended and threw up a low earthwork at a spot of high ground overlooking the bridge and the road on the other side leading to it. The next day, when Caswell arrived, his men crossed the bridge and threw up embankments on the side from which the Loyalists were expected. By the end of the day on February 26, about 800 Patriots under Caswell were on both sides of the bridge. Lillington with only about 200 men was on the east side. In a camp about six miles away MacDonald's Loyalists awaited an unanticipated fate.

MacDonald discovered soon enough that he had lost the race to the bridge and he had to decide whether still to avoid an encounter and try to continue to the coast or whether to try to cut through the little army that blocked his route. The advice of some young Scottish officers prevailed and it was determined to attack. Caswell's men on their side of the creek would be easy to take, it was reasoned, so they set out from camp just after midnight in the first hour of the 27th. Captain John Campbell led with a part of 75 of the best broadswordsmen followed by the rest of the force under command of Lt. Col. Donald McLeod, substituting for MacDonald who was too ill to march.

After Loyalist intelligence had discovered his position on the eastern bank, Caswell withdrew across the bridge and drew all of his forces together behind a rather strong breastwork. He also had artillery to cover the bridge. Once safely across, the Patriots removed the flooring of the bridge leaving only the bare sleepers. These they greased with soft soap and tallow. And then they waited for the Scots to arrive.

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About an hour before dawn, the Loyalists discovered Caswell's abandoned campsite on their side of the bridge, fires there burning low. Perhaps, they thought, the colonists had fled.

McLeod regrouped his men in nearby woods to wait for the first light of day. Suddenly from somewhere near the bridge a shot was fired and McLeod could restrain his men and hold his fire no longer. Amid shouts and cheers and the sound of bagpipes, the Loyalists rushed to the nearly demolished bridge. They were astounded at its condition and many fell into the water, some of whom were drowned. Others, using the point of their swords, managed to get some balance and made their way to the opposite side of Widow Moore's Creek. There they were near the source of the swan-shot and the bullets that had already taken a heavy toll. Caswell's men had some difficulty in lighting the fuse of the artillery when it was reported that "Colonel Caswell rode up himself and fired his pistol into the touch-hole, when she went off." The artillery fire swept the bridge and the battle was over in about three minutes. McLeod and other officers were killed; the number of wounded was great on the Loyalists' side but most of them turned and fled. The Whig victory was complete and the service of the Scots to Martin was denied. The only Patriot loss was two wounded, one of whom died, but the Loyalists lost 50 killed, wounded or missing, and of these at least 30 were killed.

Colonel Moore arrived about two hours after the battle and took command. He organized parties to pursue the fleeing Scots and before long the list of prisoners reached nearly 850 including at least 30 officers. Their victory that morning netted the Whigs some badly needed supplies and an almost unbelievably large sum of money. Soon put to good use for the Revolutionary

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cause were 350 gun and shot bags; almost 150 dirks and swords; 1,500 rifles, most of which were taken from Scots in the area after the battle who had not actually been present on that occasion; two fine new medicine chests fresh from England, one of which was valued at £300; thirteen wagons and teams; and £15,000 in gold coins. The money was found in a chest beneath the floor of a stable in Cross Creek, thanks to information furnished by a patriotic black man.

The three-minute Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in what was then New Hanover, now Pender County, was of great significance in that it denied the British a foothold in the state from which they might have accomplished their objective of restoring royal rule in the southern colonies. The American victory was hailed at home and abroad and created new enthusiasm for the cause. Men under arms rushed to the coast to repel the expected British invasion. When Cornwallis and Parker landed briefly at Smith Island, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River in May, they discovered how expensive their delay had been and concluded that an invasion would be futile. They turned instead to Charleston, S.C., and North Carolina troops joined South Carolinians in turning them away. Nearly five years passed before the British again seriously threatened North Carolina. Royal rule had totally disintegrated and North Carolina was saved.

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(For Release Immediate)
(Seventh in a Series)

THE HALIFAX RESOLVES
By William S. Powell

North Carolina was the first of the young American states to demand independence from Great Britain and April 12th marks the two hundredth anniversary of that momentous occasion. The state came to this point slowly and gradually, but once the breaking point had been reached, it reacted quickly and decisively.

In the early autumn of 1775 word reached North Carolina that King George had declared the Americans out of his protection and that he had commanded his army and navy to wage war against them. The battle at Moore's Creek Bridge on February 27, 1776, came about because of the king's decision. British soldiers and sailors had been ordered to North Carolina with his approval and Loyalists recruited in the Cape Fear Valley fought for him at Moore's Creek Bridge.

It took something like this to show the people of North Carolina how absurd the position was in which they found themselves. Before 1775, with every expression of opposition to taxation by Parliament, they added an

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expression of loyalty to "the best of Kings." After Moore's Creek Bridge they could hardly continue to express devotion to a king with whom they were waging war. Even so, many took the final step hesitatingly and sadly. In 1776 the resolutions favoring independence were received with much less joy and excitement than the ordinances of secession from the Union in 1861.

In North Carolina as elsewhere in America, prophecies of independence had been more or less common for some years. Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs in 1760 had begged the crown to strengthen his hand so that he might more effectively oppose what he called a rising spirit of independency in his colony. In 1774 William Hooper expressed the opinion that the colonies were "striding fast to independence," and a few months later Samuel Johnston spoke of the controversy between the colonies and the mother country as a "dispute between different countries." Johnston predicted a complete separation unless England yielded.

The controversy over Parliament's policy of taxing the colonies and the failure of the crown to protect British subjects in America from such arbitrary action began to be understood in a new light. It forced the colonists to examine very carefully the whole question of the relation of the king to the people, and they concluded that it rested in a "civil compact" by which "allegiance is the right of the first magistrate, and protection the right of the people." In return for their loyal devotion, the king would protect his people. If either party violated this compact it would cease to exist.

When the people learned that the king had called on Parliament for troops to be used in America, that he was hiring professional soldiers from Germany for service, and that he had proclaimed the colonies to be in rebellion and out of his protection, they concluded that the king, himself, had violated the civil compact.

By the time the Fourth Provincial Congress met at Halifax on April 4, 1776, sentiment among the people for independence was quite strong. "All our people here are up for Independence" Samuel Johnston wrote on April 5. Robert Howe echoed: "Independence seems to be the word; I know not one dissenting voice." William Hooper and John Penn, the state's delegates to the Continental Congress, had the same feeling. Hooper said that "it would be more than unpopular, it would be Toryism to hint the possibility of future reconciliation." Penn realized that the temper and disposition of the people had changed radically in recent months. All regard or fondness for the king or the British nation had gone, and a total separation seemed to be all that the friends of liberty wanted. "Reconciliation" had been the word earlier, but not so now.

Members of the Provincial Congress said that they had tried to get the opinion of the people at large, and they concluded that in many counties there was not a single person willing to speak a good word for Britain. On April 8 a committee was appointed composed of Cornelius Harnett, Allen Jones, Thomas Burke, Abner Nash, and others, "to take into consideration the usurpations and violences attempted and committed by the King and Parliament of Britain against America, and the further measures to be taken for frustrating the same and for the better defense of this Province."

After deliberating for four days, the committee reported on April 12. By way of preamble to the brief but significant Resolves, the committee reviewed the treatment America had received from King George and Parliament in the past and they also called attention to what was going at the very moment. British fleets and armies were moving against America, royal governors were arming any who would fight for Britain, merchant vessels from American ports were being seized, and multitudes of people being

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reduced "from easy circumstances . . . to the most lamentable distress."

Reference was also made by the committee to the moderation heretofore displayed, the pleas based on constitutional grounds which had been ignored, and the hopes for reconciliation which had gone unfulfilled. The committee, then, recommended that the Provincial Congress adopt the following resolution:

"Resolved, That the delegates for this colony in the Continental Congress be empowered to concur with the delegates of the other colonies in declaring independency, and forming foreign alliances, reserving to this colony the sole and exclusive right of forming a constitution and laws for this colony, and of appointing delegates from time to time (under the direction of a general representation thereof), to meet the delegates of the other colonies for such purposes as shall be hereafter pointed out."

This was the first official state action for independence, and it was not a declaration for North Carolina alone but a recommendation to the Continental Congress that independence should be declared by all of the colonies through their representatives in the Continental Congress. This was exactly the kind of action that members of the national congress had been eager to have.

A copy of the Halifax Resolves was sent promptly to North Carolina's other Continental Congressman in Philadelphia, Joseph Hewes, and there, when presented to the Congress, it struck a responsive chord. Other members of the Congress sent copies home to their constituents and urged them to "follow this laudable example." Virginia was the first to do so, and on

¹⁵ the Virginia Convention instructed her delegates in the Continental

Declaration of independence. On May 27 the North Carolina

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and Virginia delegates laid their instructions before Congress, and on June 7 Richard Henry Lee moved "that these United Colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent States." The motion was adopted on July 2 and on July 4 the final draft of the Declaration of Independence was laid before Congress and approved. It was signed on behalf of North Carolina by William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and John Penn.

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(For Release May 5, 1976)
(Eighth in a Series)

SIR HENRY CLINTON'S PROCLAMATION

By William S. Powell

Before the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, Royal Governor Josiah Martin had expected a powerful British fleet to bring Lord Cornwallis and a large number of troops from Ireland at the same time that Sir Henry Clinton would arrive from New York with additional British troops. These forces, together with the local Loyal Highland Scots, would retake North Carolina for King George and from the secure base they would establish other rebellious Southern colonies would be secured. The Highland Scots, of course, responded more quickly than Governor Martin had anticipated, but on the way to Wilmington they were defeated and dispersed by local Patriots on February 27, 1776, at Moore's Creek Bridge.

Lord Cornwallis, who was to be second in command of British forces in America under Clinton, had just recently sailed from Ireland when the battle occurred. Clinton himself was no closer than Norfolk, Virginia, at the time, and he didn't reach the mouth of the Cape Fear River until March 12. While waiting for reinforcements to arrive from Britain he landed his men on an island in the

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river so that they might exercise. Clinton expected that they would soon be called upon to take Charleston, so he trained them in street fighting while they waited. The nearby homes of several Patriot leaders were burned and furniture and valuables taken from others.

Patriot forces gathered but were too weak to do more than harass the British and keep them under observation. In one brief encounter, however, one Redcoat officer and five men were captured.

The first ships of the British fleet dropped anchor in the Cape Fear on April 18 after a very rough voyage during which several ships went down with great loss of life. The final vessels did not arrive until May 3, and after consulting with Cornwallis and Sir Peter Parker, the fleet commander, Clinton issued a proclamation on May 5 that reflects the helplessness of the British. Instead of landing and undertaking a military campaign as they had intended, the British merely resorted to rhetoric. Clinton as commander felt unsure of the reception that might await him. He had been led by Governor Martin to believe that a host of Loyalists would be on shore to welcome him; instead he found only hostile armed men.

A proclamation seemed to be the safest and perhaps most effective weapon that could be called into service by Major General Sir Henry Clinton. He characterized the recent action in North Carolina as "a most unprovoked and wicked rebellion" and said that the inhabitants had forgotten their allegiance to their sovereign, had denied the authority of the law, and had participated in a series of crimes. Tyranny, he said, had been placed in the hands of congresses and committees.

Previous attempts to arouse "the infatuated and misguided multitude to a sense of their error have hitherto unhappily proved ineffectual," he observed, and

added that it was now his duty to "proceed forthwith" against all men in arms as well as against the various members of the local congress and committees. Nevertheless, Clinton was a humane man, he claimed, and before taking such drastic steps he felt called upon "to forewarn the Deluded People of the miseries ever attendant upon Civil War." To those who were mindful of their happiness and that of their descendants he recommended, "a return to their duty to our common Sovereign, and to the blessings of a free Government as established by law."

In the name of His Majesty, then, General Clinton generously offered a full pardon to all who would lay down their arms and submit to the law. All would be pardoned, that is, except Cornelius Harnett and Robert Howe. Harnett was an outspoken Revolutionary leader whose home was nearby, and Howe was the commander of the local troops. His home also was on the banks of the Cape Fear River. In addition to offering a pardon to the heretofore active Patriots, Clinton continued: "I do hereby require that the Provincial Congress and all Committees of Safety and other unlawful Associations be dissolved." In addition, he required that judges be permitted to hold court.

The proclamation concluded with the formal words: "All persons are required to take notice as they will answer the contrary at their utmost Peril." Yet this proclamation was dated not from the firm soil of North Carolina but from on board the British transport vessel "Pallisser."

A few days later, plans were completed for a landing and under cover of darkness four battalions of infantry and two companies of light infantry landed near Orton Plantation. Their movement had been observed by local Patriots, however, they withdrew in the face of overwhelming British odds. The British burned Orton Mill and returned to their boats. On the way down the river they

plundered a number of homes situated along the shore.

There is nothing to suggest that a single person complied with Clinton's proclamation or that he seriously considered following up the veiled threat of retaliation that it contained. On May 30, Major General Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Charles Cornwallis, together with Sir Peter Parker's fleet, withdrew from the waters of North Carolina and turned their attention on Charleston in South Carolina. North Carolina forces rushed overland to help defend their neighbors' capitol. Charleston, too, proved to be more than the British had anticipated, and they withdrew to leave the South free of military activity until near the end of the war.

The threat of action by Clinton probably served to unite North Carolinians into a stronger bond of opposition to British tyranny. It was certainly during the weeks just after the battle at Moore's Creek Bridge that they ceased to express loyalty to King George. It was the king, they reasoned, who had send an army against them, and all fondness for His Majesty vanished among the Patriots.

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(For Release August 1, 1976)
Ninth in a Series

" North Carolina Council of Safety Sponsors Reading of Declaration"

by William S. Powell

Although the Declaration of Independence was formally adopted on July 4, 1776, it was signed on that day only by John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress. It was not until July 19 that the journal noted the preparation of a fair copy for signing, and on August 2 it was ready to be signed. Some members were not present however, and they signed later.

Word of the adoption of the Declaration spread slowly, at least by modern standards, and it was not until July 19 that the North Carolina Council of Safety, the executive authority in the new state, took notice of it at its meeting in the town on Halifax. In what was apparently the only business of the day, the Council directed that Committees of Safety in the towns and counties of North Carolina, as soon as they received a copy of the Declaration, should cause it " to be proclaimed in the most public manner in Order that the good people of this Colony may be fully informed there. "

The Council of Safety on July 27 believed that copies would soon be available, and it was ordered that Thursday, August 1, be " set apart for proclaiming the said declaration at the Court House in the Town of Halifax. " The public was requested to attend. The occasion was described in 1834 by Joseph Seawell Jones of nearby Shocco, who had an account of it from

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" a pious and elderly lady" who was present.

" On the appointed day of an immense concourse of people assembled at Halifax to witness the interesting ceremony of a public proclamation of the Declaration of Independence, " he wrote. " The Provincial troops and militia companies were all drawn up in full array, to witness the scene and to swear by their united acclamations to consummate the deed. At mid-day Cornelius Harnett ascended a rostrum which has been erected in front of the Court House, and even as he opened the scroll, upon which was written the immortal words of the Declaration, the enthusiasm of the immense crowd broke forth in our loud swell of rejoicing and prayer. The reader proceeded to his task, and read the Declaration to the mute and impassioned multitude with the solemnity of an appeal to Heaven. When he had finished, all the people shouted with joy, and the cannon, sounding from fort to fort, proclaimed the glorious tidings, that all the Thirteen Colonies were now free and independent States. The soldiers, seized Mr. Harnett, and bore him on their shoulders through the streets of the town, applauding him as their champion, and swearing allegiance to the instrument he had read."

The Council of Safety was anxious that similar ceremonies be held wherever possible to impress the people with the significance of this document. They became aware of the fact that in Cumberland County, home of many Highland Scots who were loyal to the King, there was no Committee of Safety to perform this ceremony. The Council designated two militia colonels and directed that either of them, as soon as a copy of the Declaration could be obtained, should call a meeting of all the inhabitants of the county and read it. And beyond that, he should also read the Provincial Congress's resolutions about the seriousness of treason. A hint to the wise should be sufficient.

There was some doubt as to the affections of the Moravians, and on August 6 a militia captain posted a copy of the Declaration of Independence at the Salem Tavern for the information of all. Good Moravians took the hint, and on August 12 they deleted the name of the king and the royal family from their Litany . On the same date that the Declaration was posted in Salem, another copy was posted in nearby Bethania, and on August 13 it was read in Richmond, then the seat of Surry County in which the Moravian communities

were located.

In Salisbury on August 7 an announcement of the Declaration was made and it was reported "that the King of Great Britain would no longer be considered the King of America. "

Slowly word of the action of the Continental Congress on July 4 was working its way down the coast and into the backcountry. From Charleston, S. C., on August 9 General Robert Howe, a North Carolinian who had taken part in the defense of that city from the British, wrote home that a rider had just that moment arrived with the Declaration of Independence. It was a document, he said, that gave " the highest satisfaction to every individual (a few Tories excepted) in the Place."

General Howe continued by observing that the times called "for the Exercise of every Public, every private Virtue; all private pique, personal prejudice, party animosity and opposition shou'd be forgotten, for that wretch will be truly contemptible who suffers these to have influence upon his conduct at this truly awful crisis, when union alone can Effect the Glorious Establishment we are struggling for."

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Division of Archives and History
State of North Carolina

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Tenth in a Series

"North Carolina's Constitution of 1776"

By William S. Powell

When news reached North Carolina late in July 1776 of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence here leaders concluded that a constitution should be drawn up as soon as possible. An election was called for October 15 to select delegates to the Fifth Provincial Congress which would be charged with preparing a Constitution.

This would be an important body and there was broad interest in the fall election. Two points of view surfaced. One group, called the conservatives, preferred a government very much like the one they had known under British rule with an independent system of courts, important officers appointed by the legislature, and a legislature elected every year. On the other hand, people called radicals wanted a much more democratic government. Annual elections would be held, if their scheme prevailed, for officers great and small.

When the election was over it was discovered that over three-fourths of the delegates to the Congress, that would also be a constitutional convention, had served in earlier Congresses. Only about a third of the delegates had never served in either the legislature or the Provincial Congress, but three or four outstanding conservatives were notably absent.

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This Congress convened in Halifax on December 12, 1776, and the next day a 17-man committee was appointed to draw up a Bill of Rights and to prepare a Constitution for the state. Included were four generals and at least one school-teacher. Except for Hezekiah Alexander from Mecklenburg County and Griffith Rutherford from Rowan County the members were all from the east.

On December 6 committee member Thomas Jones of Chowan County presented the completed Constitution to the Congress for consideration and on the 12th he brought in the Bill of Rights. On the 17th the Bill of Rights was amended and adopted, and on the 18th the Constitution was amended and adopted. The former document was discussed on the floor for just four days and the Constitution for six days.

The Bill of Rights actually was called the Declaration of Rights and it was drawn in large measure from the Virginia Bill that had been adopted about six months earlier. Several of its provisions, however, came from recommendations made by the people of Mecklenburg and Halifax counties to their representatives in the Congress, but much was based ultimately on the English Declaration of Rights of 1689 and on other English documents dating back to the thirteenth century. Maryland's constitution was completed just two days before the committee was appointed in North Carolina, but that document was known in Halifax and was also the source of some of the provisions of Declaration of Rights.

From Pennsylvania's new constitution North Carolina found inspiration for sections of both the Declaration of Rights and the Constitution. The New Jersey and Delaware constitutions were also consulted and each of them contributed in lesser degree to the North Carolina committee's work.

From her long colonial experience the state also drew ideas. In form the new government was very much like that of the colonial period. There would be a governor, a two-house legislature, a system of courts, and local government. Colonial experience with harsh governors, however, produced some changes at least in the spirit of government. Henceforth the governor would be subordinated to the legislature. The General Assembly would elect the governor as well as his council.

Each county, regardless of population, was granted one senator and two members in the House of Commons, as the lower house was called. Only those who owned land were qualified to vote for senators or to hold office in either house. Free men who paid taxes, however, could vote for members of the House of Commons. Even though the governor was appointed by the legislature, he was still required to be the holder of property of considerable worth. Clearly the government to be established would be one controlled by men of wealth. Democracy certainly was not foremost in the minds

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of the framers of the Constitution.

There were other restrictive measures in the Constitution that were to cause concern at a later time. There was a sectarian test for office holding designed to eliminate Roman Catholics, Jews, and others , and ministers of any faith were declared ineligible to serve in the legislature.

It apparently did not occur to the committee that future changes in their document might be desirable, and it contained no provision for amendment. This was the cause of much distress in the state for a number of years prior to 1835 when a convention was finally called to revise the 1776 Constitution to make it more nearly serve the growing state.

North Carolina's first Constitution was never submitted to a vote of the people. One can only speculate as to the reason for this. Perhaps the Provincial Congress feared it would be rejected. It was simply declared to be adopted and in force, and the Congress set about the task of selecting officers, preparing for an election of legislators, and inaugurating the new government.



